Parent Involvement:

Increasing Student Literacy Skills & Values

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**Introduction**

This Action Research Project focuses on how parent or extended family involvement, through book clubs and reading-centered activities can help improve children’s motivation to read and essentially help them improve their literacy skills. Parent and teacher relationships are a cornerstone to a child’s successful and well-rounded education. Educators should view parents as assets to a child’s education and should be encouraged to share their culture in their child’s school. With the encouragement of parents, children will understand the importance of reading and how it can conceivably become an enjoyable hobby and lifelong skill. Reading will not only help students do well in school it will also provide them with a relaxing outlet. In modern society most children are watching television, playing on game counsels, or playing on the latest tablets, these activities offer instant gratification, are usually non-educational, and lack the stimulation that children need to do well in an academic setting. With small book clubs facilitated by a teacher and parents, students might improve and understand the importance of literacy given that their mentors (teacher/parents) exhibit a passionate love for reading.

**Statement of the Problem**

NYC schools in low income, high immigrant neighborhoods have little economic resources to offer a school. Students in Public School X are suffering the consequences of government budget cuts and larger class sizes, and more (English Language Learners) ELL and (Special Education) SE students are being transitioned too quickly into the General Education (GE) classes. Parents are great resources that need to be seen as valuable assets to a learning community. Teachers can help parents understand reading skills that are needed to enhance literacy. Parents’ time participating in afterschool or before school book club meetings will help instructors reinforce the importance of reading.

**Literature Review**

**Parent and Teacher Relationships**

Parents and guardians are a very important part of a child’s education, if not the most important. As cited in LeFevre & Shaw (2012), research has shown parental involvement to be a positive factor for children as young as kindergarten and this effect is equally apparent through all levels of a child’s educational experience: elementary school, middle school, high school, and even into the college years (Alfro, Umana-Taylor, & Bamaca, 2006; Barnard,2004; Martinez, DeGarmo, & Eddy,2004; McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004).

Children in the United States of America spend the majority of their time outside of school. By the time they are 18 year old they have only spent 9% of their life in school (Bauerlein, 2007). Therefore, 81% of their time is influenced by their community and their family unit. Prior to children entering a public school system they have had at least 4-5 years of influences outside of a public school. While some children begin school as proficient readers others enter never opening a book, this creates several challenges for educators who are trying to reach both sets of students. One would suppose that this is a reflection to the socio economic status (SES) of the child’s parents.

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), measures student success rates around the world, over 70 countries, measuring 15 year olds’ competence in three subject areas: math, science and reading. The PISA study ranks students across different countries and determines whether their knowledge can help them become a useful part of the workforce. In Borgonovi’s (2010) analysis of PISA’s 2009 data he determined that parent involvement in the early years of their child’s education greatly affects how well students do when they are 15 years old. According to PISA, the performance advantage among students whose parents read to them in their early school years is evident regardless of the family’s SES (Borgonovi, 2011). Therefore SES may not entirely affect a child’s potential to become well-educated. Parents must understand the magnitude of helping their children to become literate; irrespective of whether their native language is different than the language being taught at school. As cited in *How parents can help their children succeed at school,* (2011), reading and talking in a child’s home language builds these skills as effectively as reading and talking in the language of the school (August& Hakuta, 1997). Some children whom English is their second language, have an easy transition from their native language to English, because they have parents that are literate in their native tongue. Immigrant families encounter different challenges as opposed to American born citizens; many do not speak English, they do not fully understand the operation of the American education system, and they do not have a well-established support system.

Are schools providing parents sufficient support to help them become assets to their child’s education?

Teachers and school administrators initiating parent involvement is a fundamental factor in creating any type of parent involvement especially in a majority minority community. Parents especially parents of color with low SES are more likely to be involved when schools and teachers invite them in culturally responsive ways to participate at school (Delgado, Gaintan, 1994; Epstein 1990; Hoover-Dempsey &Sandler,1997). Ryan, Casas, Kelly- Vance & Ryalls, as cited in Hill & Craft (2003), found that teachers believed that parents who volunteered at school valued education more than did other parents. Immigrant families and minority parents are seen as uninvolved and as individuals who do not care about their child’s education. Part of the solution then should be placed upon the educators. It may seem that teachers are burdened by a lot of responsibilities. However, through the eyes of many minority parents, teachers have the advantage in their teacher-parent relationship and therefore, teachers are entitled to take the first step in starting a rapport.

How can these parents become resources for their children when they are not permitted to volunteer in their child’s school?

In a New York Times, Lewin (2012) describes the number of schools requiring parents to be fingerprinted and provide references in order to volunteer. This creates a sense of a lack of trust that schools have toward their students’ parents and communities. As stated earlier, data has shown that monitory parents have not been the most ardent volunteers, with these policies minority parents will be less inclined to offer their time. This system also helps to exclude parents residing in the country illegally. This is a disadvantage to the children of illegal immigrants and sets a precedent upon the student’s family and extended family, that they are not needed or welcomed in the school.

**Methods**

Why is reading an essential part of a child’s education? What can illiteracy perpetuate?

Reading not only helps children do well in an academic setting it also increases their chances of becoming productive members of society. Good reading skills provide access to the wider curriculum and decent jobs, and research shows that many of the long –term unemployment – and even prisoners – have literacy problems (*Make it a relaxed read: Opinion*, 2008). The cost of large- scale illiteracy to society as a whole is the individual tragedy of unrealized potential in personal growth, self- sufficiency, and economic achievement magnified a million times (Ahmed, 1992). Unemployment and imprisonment are not the expectations that parents have for their children’s futures. When people have children they are not given a manual on how to raise a child to have a successful education.

As cited in O'Connor-Petruso & Girelli-Carasi(2009), literacy used to be defined as “reading and writing” but has now expanded to include listening and speaking, competencies in mathematics and technology and proficiency in visual, communication and calculation skills (Cooper &Kiger, 2006; Goldber, 2006). Teachers motivate students to become avid readers by creating and/or implementing several programs that promote reading. To create motivated readers educators differentiate instruction to better match the needs of all children. Differentiated instruction is the approach that supports the success of all students given the different achievement levels, developmental levels, and learning needs within one classroom (Teach for America, 2011). In providing students with options of choosing which activity they would like to pursue, children did not feel forced to read. By focusing on such practices as these, Ymmersta School in Finland, has created a community of readers and a motivational reading environment for all students that honor individual differences and abilities. Teachers at the Ymmersta School understand that making students eager to read depends more on a motivational learning environment than on a given reading program, and that motivated students will persevere with reading despite difficulties they may encounter along the way. (Linna, 2005)

In Finland, at Ytternäs School, the school librarian Elspeth Randelin created reading activities to motivate students to borrow books from the library. By creating reading circles with parents and/or celebrities, students were able to observe the adults’ love for reading. Elspeth emphasizes that neither the school nor the home alone can achieve the desired result when it comes to reading for pleasure (Ronholm, 2009), they must both work together to reach their children. At the end of the school year Randelin was able to reach her goal, children checked out over 3,000 books over the course of the summer.

Learning to be literate is certainly more complex than just learning reading and writing skills alone for it is surrounded by the cultural practices of the home and school (Barone, 2010). At the end of the school year the school came to the conclusion that they will try to implement the same program in the higher levels. Parents who were involved during the first year can also serve as volunteers to show other parents, the basic practices that are needed to read with children. After several of the classes, participants were able to keep the books that they had read. Having children keep some of the books that they had read served as an incentive. This will help to create a method in which parents can raise money to purchase books for their children.

Whittingham & Huffman (2009) studied the effects that a book club can have on children in middle school. Sixty students from two schools participated in this study. The book clubs were independent book clubs, this helped students choose a book club in an area of their interest. The facilitators of the meeting were interns from universities. The interns shared their favorite books and this supported the importance of reading as a part life. A central factor from this experiment was the lack of good reading material available to students.

Why are parents not aware of the free resources that can potentially benefit their children? How can a school create more learning environments outside of the classroom?

Libraries and community organizations offer a plethora of educational and enjoyable experiences but, parents who are not aware of this will not take advantage of it. Providing parents with the tools they will need to better nurture their child’s education is a priceless commodity. Give a man a fish and he will eat for one day, but teach him to fish and he and his family will eat for a lifetime (Harstad, 2012).

The Suzuki method created by Shin’ichi Suzuki, arose when Suzuki was having a difficult time learning German, he wondered why it was so natural for humans to learn their native tongue, and how that approach can be used to teach children to play an instrument. As Suzuki emphasized learning an instrument, Camboune examined three different approaches of rote learning and came to the conclusion that the method of rote learning can be used to helping children become literate.

Comboune’s 2002 study found the following: All of them have inherent elements of the traditional apprenticeship process. For example, they make explicit much of the convert invisible know-how that has to be acquired; they encourage student observation and commentary; and they allow skill to build up bit by bit, yet permit participation even for the relatively unskilled, often as a result of the social sharing tasks.

Suzuki’s intention was not meant to create amazing musicians but to create noble citizens. Children acknowledge that it takes time and effort to become a great musician and essentially they will adapt this effort into their daily lives.

**Theorist**

Epstein’s model of parental involvement (1995) describes six ways in which a parent can become involved. A parent does not have to exhibit all six types of involvement in order to be a highly involved parent. The six types also help educators understand the ways in they can help parents become aware of the many ways in which they can become a more involved parent. Epstein’s six types of ways of involvement are listed on the National Network of Partnership Schools:

TYPE 1- Parenting: Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.

TYPE 2--Communicating: Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.

TYPE 3--Volunteering: Improve recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs.

TYPE 4--Learning at home: Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-linked activities and decisions.

TYPE 5—Decision Making: Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, and other parent organizations.

TYPE 6 -- Collaborating with the community: Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community.

These six types not only help parents become more involved in schools but are also steps that teachers can employ to help make the community more involved in school. This will encourage both family and communities because their actions are valued by an institution.

Vygostky developed the theory zone of proximal development; it is the difference between what a learner can do without help and what he or she can do with help. It is a concept developed by Soviet psychologist and social constructivist Lev Vygotsky (1896 - 1934). As cited in Yasnitsky (2011), Vygotsky (1962, 1978) focuses on language as a social and communicative activity. He argues that higher level skills are the result of the child's learning of social functional relationships; in becoming literate, children learn the structures and processes inherent in socially meaningful literacy activities. Literacy, with the assistance of an instructor, challenges a child to think outside the box and create new and enlightened meaning to the text. This would not be made possible if the instructor is not aware of their zone of proximal development.

**Research Hypothesis**

Implement parent volunteers to read and integrate reading skills, during a three-month period, 3

times a week for 1 hour to a group of 20 third grade students in an urban elementary school in

Brooklyn, NY, will increase literacy levels and help reinforce the importance of reading.

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Improvement.

Appendix A: Principal Consent Form

Dear Principal,

My name is Erika Gil. I am a student attending Brooklyn College, who is enrolled in an Action Research class. I am completing an Action Research project and I would appreciate your support in completing it. The project is focused on helping students with their literacy skills. By creating a book club that takes place after or before school hours, students will increase the amount of time that they engage in reading. The project requires the assistance of both the parent volunteers and the students. All the data from the school will be undisclosed for the security of all the participants and the school administration.

Surveys will be given before and after the research to view the effectiveness of a book club. This information will be useful for instructors that are having difficulties reaching some students. The focus of the reading club is to create motivated readers and provide parents with tools that can help guide their children through the world of literature.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at egilteach@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Erika Gil

Today’s date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

I, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ allow Erika Gil an Early Action Research project on the education topic stated.

Appendix B: Instructor Consent Form

Dear Instructor,

My name is Erika Gil. I am a student attending Brooklyn College, who is enrolled in an Action Research class. I am completing an Action Research project and I would appreciate your support in completing it. The project is focused on helping students with their literacy skills. By creating a book club that takes place after or before school hours, students will increase the amount of time that they engage in reading. The project requires the assistance of both the parents and the students. All the data from the school will be undisclosed for the security of all the participants and the school.

Surveys will be given before and after the research to view the effectiveness of a book club. This information will be useful for students that are having difficulty reading. The focus of the reading club is to create motivated readers and provide parents with tools that can help guide their children through the world of literature.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at [egilteach@gmail.com](mailto:egilteach@gmail.com).

Sincerely,

Erika Gil

Today’s date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

I, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ allow Erika Gil an Early Action Research project on the education topic stated.

Appendix C: Parent/Guardian Consent Form.

Dear Parents/Guardians,

My name is Erika Gil. I am a student attending Brooklyn College, who is enrolled in an Action Research class. I am completing an Action Research project and I would appreciate your support in completing it. The project is focused on helping students with their literacy skills. By creating a book club that takes place after or before school hours, students will increase the amount of time that they engage in reading. The project requires the assistance of both the parents and the students. All the data from the school will be undisclosed for the security of you, your child, and the school.

Surveys will be given before and after the research to view the effectiveness of a book club. The focus of the reading club is to create motivated readers and provide parents with tools that can help guide their children through the world of literature.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at [egilteach@gmail.com](mailto:egilteach@gmail.com).

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | I give permission for my child, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, to participate in this study conducted by Erika Gil. |
|  | I do not give permission for my child, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, to participate in this study conducted by Erika Gil. |

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

(Signature) (Date)